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The Long Ago

THEN said he unto me,
Go thy way,
Weigh me the
weight of the fire,
Or measure me the
blast of the wind,
Or *call me again*
the day that is past.

II Esdras IV: 5

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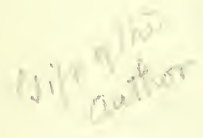
The Long Ago



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THE day is done, and yet we linger here at the window of the private office, alone, in the early evening. Street sounds come surging up to us—the hoarse Voice of the City—a confused blurr of noise—clanging trolley-cars, rumbling wagons, and familiar cries—all the varied commotion of the home-going hour when the city's buildings are pouring forth their human tide of laborers into the clogged arteries.

We lean against the window-frame, looking across and beyond the myriad roofs, and listening. The world-weariness has touched our temples with gray, and the heaviness of the day's concerns and tumult presses in, presses in . . . . presses in . . . .

Yet as we look into the gentle twilight, the throbbing street below slowly changes to a winding country road . . . . the tall buildings fade in the sunset glow until they

become only huge elm-trees
overtopping a dusty lane . . . .
the trolley-bells are softened so that
they are but the distant tinkle of the
homeward herd on the hills . . . .
and you and I in matchless freedom
are once more trudging the Old Dear
Road side by side, answering the call
of the wondrous Voice of Boyhood
sounding through the years.

The Garden

The Garden

It was the spirit of the garden that crept into my boy-heart and left its fragrance, to endure through the years. What the garden stood for—what it expressed—left a mysterious but certain impress. Grandmother's touch hallowed it and made it a thing apart, and the rare soul of her seemed to be reflected in the Lilies of the Valley that bloomed sweetly year by year in the shady plot under her favorite window in the sitting-room. Because the garden was her special province, it expressed her own sturdy, kindly nature. Little wonder, then, that we cherished it; that I loved to roam idly there feeling the enfoldment of that same protection and loving-kindness which drew me to the shelter of her gingham-aproned lap when the griefs of Boyhood pressed too hard upon me; and that we walked in it so contentedly in the cool of the evening, after the Four O'clocks had folded their purple petals for the night.

Grandmother's garden, like all real gardens, wasn't just flowers and fragrance.

There was a brick walk leading from the front gate to the sitting-room entrance—red brick, all moss-grown, and with the tiny weeds and grasses pushing up between the bricks. In the garden proper the paths were of earth, bordered and well-defined by inch-wide boards that provided jolly tight-rope practice until grandmother came anxiously out with her oft-repeated: "Willie, don't walk on those boards; you'll break them down." And just after the warm spring showers these earth-walks always held tiny mud-puddles where the rain-bleached worms congregated until the robins came that way.

There's something distinctive and individual about the paths in a garden—they either "belong," or they do not. Imagine cement walks in grandmother's garden! Its walks are as much to a garden as its flowers or its birds or its beetles, and express that dear, indescribable intimacy that makes the Phlox a

"And shining
clear and true
. . . I see her
who was the
Spirit of the Garden."

friend and the Johnny-Jump-Up a playfellow.

The best place for angle-worms was underneath the white Syringa bush—the tallest bloomer in the garden except the great Red Rose that climbed over the entire wall of the house, tacked to it by strips of red flannel, and whose blossoms were annually counted and reported to the weekly newspaper.

Another good place was under the Snowball bush, where the ground was covered with white petals dropped from the countless blossom-balls that made passers-by stop in admiration.

Still another good digging-ground was in the Lilac corner where the purple and white bushes exhaled their incomparable perfume. Grandmother forbade digging in the flower-beds—it was all right to go into the vegetable garden, but the tender flower-roots must not be exposed to the

sun by ruthless boy hands intent only on the quest of bait.

Into the lapel of my dress coat She fastened a delicate orchid last night. It must have cost a pretty penny, at this season—enough, no doubt, to buy the seeds that would reproduce a half-dozen of my grandmother's gardens. And as we moved away in the limousine She asked me why I was so silent. She could not know that when she slipped its rare stem into place upon my coat, the long years dropped away—and I stood again where the Yellow Rose, all thorn-covered, lifted its sunny top above the picket fence—plucked its choicest blossom, put it almost apologetically and ashamed into the buttonhole of my jacket—stuffed my hands into my pockets and went whistling down the street, with the yellow rose-tint and the sunlight and the curls on my child head all shining in harmony. The first *boutonniere* of my life—from the bush that became my *confidant* through

all those wondrous years before they packed my trunk and sent me off to college!

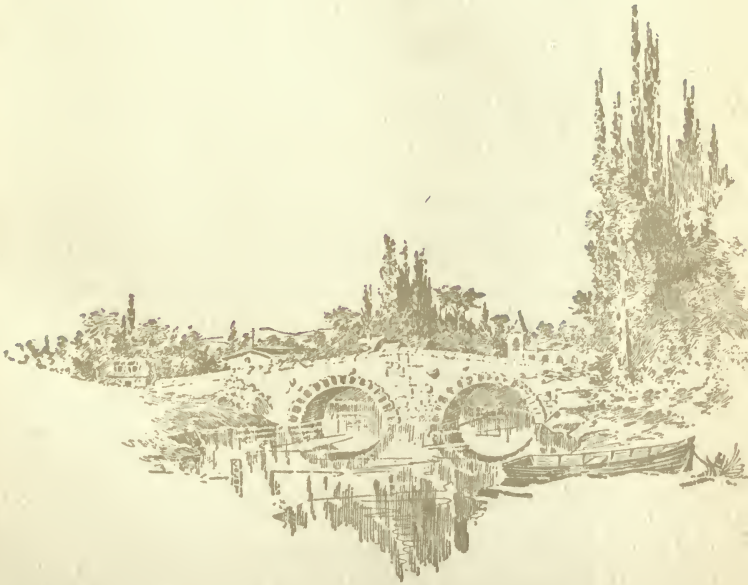
To be sure, I loved the bright-faced Pansies which smiled cheerily up at me from their round bed—and the dear old Pinks, of a strange fragrance all their own—and the Sweet William, and even the grewsome Bleeding Heart that drooped so sad and forlorn in its alloted corner. Yet it is significant that last night's orchid took me straight back over memory's pathway to that simple yellow rose-bush by the fence!

Tonight, with the forgotten orchid in my lapel, and all the weight of the great struggle lying heavy against my heart, I stand where the night-fog veils the scraggly eucalyptus, and the dense silence blots out all the noises that have intervened between the Then and the Now—and I can see again the gorgeous Peonies, pink and white, where they toss their shaggy heads, and gather as of old the

flaming Cock's Comb by the little path. I hear the honey-bees droning in the Crab Apple tree by the back gate, and watch the robins crowding the branches of the Mountain Ash, where the bright red berries cluster. I see the terrible bumble-bee bear down the Poppy on its slender stem and go buzzing threateningly away, all pollen-covered.

And shining clear and true through the mist I see her who was the Spirit of the Garden. There she stands, on the broad step beside the bed where the Lilies of the Valley grew, leaning firmly upon her one crutch, looking out across her garden to each loved group of her flower-friends —smiling out upon them as she did each day through fifty years—turning at last into the house and taking with her, in her heart, the glory of the Hollyhocks against the brick wall, the perfume of the Narcissus in the border, the wing-song of the humming-bird among the Honeysuckle, and the warmth of the glad June sunshine.

The River



The River

The river wasn't a big river as I look back at it now, yet it was wide and wandering and deep, and flowed quietly along through a wonderful Middle West valley, dividing the Little Old Town geographically and socially. Its shores furnished such a boy playground as never was known anywhere else in all the world—for it was a gentle river, a kindly playfellow, an understanding friend; and it seemed to fairly thrill in responsive glee when I plunged, naked and untamed, beneath the eddying waters of the swimming-hole under the overhanging wild-plum tree.

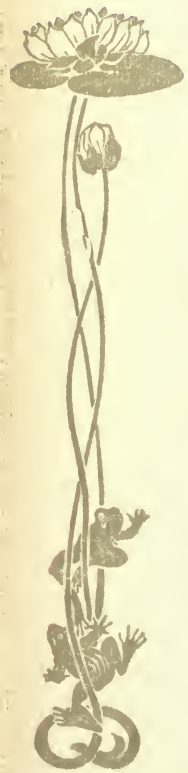
Its banks, curving in a semi-circle around the village, marked the borders of the whole wide world. There were other rivers, other villages, other lands somewhere—all with strange, queer names—existing only in the geographies to worry little children. The real world, and all the really, truly folks and things, were along the far-stretching banks of this our river. Down by the flats, where the tiny creek widened to a minature swamp and emptied its placid waters into the main stream, the red-wing blackbirds sounded their strange cry among the cat-tails and the bull-rushes; the frogs croaked in ceaseless and reverberant chorus; the catfish were ever hungry after dark, and the night was broken by the glare of torches along

the little bridge or in a group of boats where fisher-lads kept close watch upon their corks. Far below The Dam, where the changeful current had left a wide sand-bar and a great tree-trunk stretched its fallen length across from the shore to the water's edge, the mud-turtles basked in the sunshine, and, at the approach of Boyhood, glided or splashed to the safety of the water.

The banks of the river were a deep and silent jungle wherein all manner of wild beasts and birds were hunted; its bosom was the vasty deep out upon which our cherished argosies were sent. And how often their prows were unexpectedly turned by some new current into mid-stream; sometimes saved by an assortment of missles breathlessly thrown to the far side, to bring them, wave-washed, back to us; sometimes, alas, swept mercilessly out to depths where only the eye and childish grief could follow them over the big dam to certain wreckage in the whirlpools below, but even then not abandoned until the shore had been patrolled for salvage as far as courage held out.

Let's go back to the banks of our beloved river, you and I—and get up early in the morning and run to the riffles near the old cooper-shop and catch a bucket of shiners and chubs, and then hurry on to Boomer's dam—or 'way upstream above the Island where we used to have the Sunday-school picnics—or maybe just stay at the in-town dam near the flour-

mills and the saw-mills where old Shoemaker Schmidt used to catch so many big ones—fat, yellow pike and broad black-bass. We will climb high up on the mist-soaked timbers of the mill-race and settle ourselves contentedly—with the spray moistening our faces and the warm sun browning our hands—and the heavy pounding of falling waters sounding in our ears so melodiously and so sweetly. Lazily, drowsily we'll hold a bamboo pole and guide our shiner through the foam-crowned eddies of the whirlpool, awaiting the flash of a golden side or a lusty tug at the line; and dreamily watch a long, narrow stream of shavings and sawdust, loosed from the opposite planing-mill, float away on the current. And here, in the dear dream-days, the conquering of the world will be a simple matter; for through the mist-prisms that rise from the foaming waters below the dam only rainbows can be seen—and there is Youth and the Springtime, and the new-born flowers and mating birds, and The River. . . .



And when the sun is low we'll wind our poles, at the end of a rare and great day—one that cannot die with the sunset, but that will live so long as Memory is. Tonight we need not trudge over the fields toward home, in happy weariness, to Her who waited and watched for us at the window, peering through the gathering dusk until the anxious heart was stilled by the sight of tired little legs dragging down the street past the postoffice. We'll stay here in the twi-

light, and watch the fire-flies light their fitful lamps, and the first stars blinking through the afterglow; and when the night drops down see the black bats careening weirdly across the moon. . . . And we'll stretch out again on the wild grass—soothed by the fragrance of the Mayapple and the violets, and the touch of the night-wind. . . How still it is . . . and The River doesn't seem to sound so loud when your head's on the ground—and your eyes are closed—and you're listening to the far, far, far-off lullaby of tumbling waters—and you're a bit tired, perhaps . . . a bit tired. . . .

THE WINTER STREAM

Somehow The River never terrified me.

(It did mother, however!)

Perhaps it brought no fear to me because it flowed so gently and so helpfully through such a wonderful valley of peace and plenty. Even in its austere winter aspect, with its tree-banks bare of leaves and its snow-and-ice-bound setting, it rejoiced me.

Teams of big horses and wagons and scores of men worked busily upon its frozen surface, sawing and cutting and packing ice in the big wooden houses along the banks.

Always there was enough wind for an ice-boat or a skate-sail, or to send a fellow swiftly along when

mother-made promises were forgotten and an unbuttoned coat was held outstretched to catch the breeze.

At night the torches and bonfires flickered and glowed where the skaters sent the merry noises of their revelry afloat through the crisp air as they dodged steel-footed in and out among the huts of the winter fishermen.

Perhaps I loved the winter river because I knew that beneath its forbidding surface there was the life of my loved lilies, and because I knew that all in good time the real river—our river—would be restored to us again, alive and joyous and unchanged.

One day, when first the tiny rivulets started to run from the bottom of the snow-drifts, The River suddenly unloosed its artillery and the crisp air reechoed with the booming that proclaimed the breaking-up of the ice. Great crowds of people thronged the banks, wondering if the bridge would go out or would stand the strain of pounding ice-cakes. The unmistakable note of a robin sounded from somewhere. Great dark spots began to show in the white ice-ribbon that wound through the valley. The air at sundown had lost its sting.

So day by day the breaking-up continued until at last the blessed stream was clear—the bass jumped hungry to the fly—the daffodils and violets sprang from beneath their wet leaf-blankets—and all the

world joined the birds in one grand song of emancipation and joy.

THE BIG BEND

Above the town, just beyond the red iron bridge, the river made a great bend and widened into a lake where the banks were willow-grown and reeds and rushes and grasses and lily-pads pushed far out into mid-stream, leaving only a narrow channel of clear water.

To the Big Bend our canoe glided often, paddling lazily along and going far up-stream to drift back with the current.

Arms bared to the shoulder, we reached deep beneath the surface to bring up the long-stemmed water-lilies—the great white blossoms, and the queer little yellow-and-black ones.

Like a bright-eyed sprite the tiny marsh-wren flitted among the rushes, and the musk-rat built strange reed-castles at the water's edge.

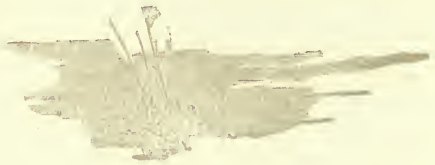
The lace-winged dragon-fly following our boat darted from side to side, or poised in air, or alighted on the dripping blade of our paddle when it rested for a moment across our knees.

Among the grasses the wind-harps played weird melodies which only Boyhood could interpret.

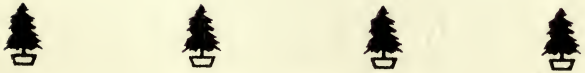
In this place The River sang its love-songs, and sent forth an answering note to the vast harmonious

blending of blue sky and golden day and incense-heavy air and the glad songs of birds.

And here at this tranquil bend The River seemed to be the self-same river of the old, loved hymn we sang so often in the Little Church With The White Steeple—that river which "flows by the throne of God"; fulfilling the promise of the ancient prophet of prophets and bringing "peace . . . like a river, and glory . . . like a flowing stream."



Christmas



Christmas

WE always used grandmother's stocking—because it was the biggest one in the family, much larger than mother's, and somehow it seemed able to stretch more than hers. There was so much room in the foot, too—a chance for all sorts of packages.

There was a carpet-covered couch against the flowered wall in one corner of the parlor. Between the foot of it and the chimney, was the door into our bedroom. I always hung my stocking at the side of the door nearest the couch, on the theory, well-defined in my mind with each recurring Christmas, that if by any chance Santa Claus brought me more than he could get into the stocking, he could pile the overflow on the couch. And he always did!

It may seem strange that a lad who seldom heard even the third getting-up call in the morning should have awakened without any calling once a year—or that his red-night-gowned figure should have leaped from the depths of his feather bed—or that he should have crept breathless and fearful to the door where the stocking hung. Notwithstanding the ripe experience of years past, when each Christmas found the generous stocking stuffed with good things, there was always the chance that Santa Claus might have forgotten, this year—or that he might have miscalculated his supply and not have enough to go 'round—

or that he had not been correctly informed as to just what you wanted—or that some accident might have befallen his reindeer-and-sleigh to detain him until the grey dawn of Christmas morning stopped his work and sent him scurrying back to his toy kingdom to await another Yule-tide.

And so, in the fearful silence and darkness of that early hour, with stilled breath and heart beating so loudly you thought it would awaken everyone in the house, you softly opened the door—poked your arm through—felt around where the stocking ought to be, but with a great sinking in your heart when you didn't find it the first time—and finally your chubby fist clutched the misshapen, lumpy, bulging fabric that proclaimed a generous Santa Claus.

Yes, it was there!

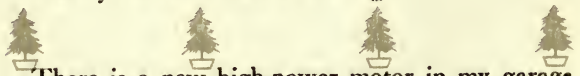
That was enough for the moment. A hurried climb back into the warm bed—and then interminable years of waiting until your attuned ear caught the first sounds of grandmother's dressing in her nearby bedroom, and the first gleam of winter daylight permitted you to see the wondrous stocking and the array of packages on the sofa. It was beyond human strength to refrain from just one look. But alas! The sight of a dapple-grey rocking-horse with silken mane and flowing tail was too much, and the next moment you were in the room with your arms around his arched neck, while peals of unrestrained joy brought the whole family to the scene. Then it

was that mother gathered you into her lap, and wrapped her skirt about your bare legs, and held your trembling form tight in her arms until you promised to get dressed if they would open just one package—the big one on the end of the sofa. After that there was always "just one more, mother, please!" and by that time the base burner was warming up and you were on the floor in the middle of the discarded wrapping-paper, uncovering each wondrous package down to the very last—the very, very last—in the very toe of the stocking—the big round one that you were sure was a real league ball but which proved to be nothing but an orange! . . .

No Santa Claus? *Huh!* . . .

If there isn't any Santa Claus, what does he put all the sample toys in the stores for every Christmas so boys and girls can see what they want? If *he* doesn't fill the stockings, who does, I'd like to know. Some folks say that father and mother do it—but s'posin' they do, it's only to help Santa Claus sometimes when he's late or overworked, or something like that.

The *Spirit of Christmas* is Santa Claus—else how could he get around to everybody in the whole world at exactly the same time of the night?

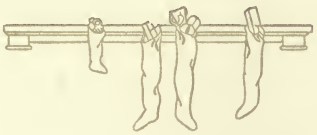


There is a new high-power motor in my garage. It came to me yesterday—Christmas. It is very

beautiful, and it cost a great deal of money, a very great deal. If we were in the Little Old Town it would take us all out to Aunt Em's farm in ten minutes. (It always took her an hour to drive in with the old spotted white mare.)

I am quite happy to have this wonderful new horse of today, and there is some warmth inside of me as I walk around it in the garage while Henry, its keeper, flicks with his chamois every last vestige of dust from its shiny sides.

And yet . . . how gladly would I give it up if only I could have been in my feather bed last night —if I could have awakened at daybreak and crept softly, red-flanneled and barefooted, to the parlor door—if I could have groped for grandmother's stocking and felt its lumpy shape respond to my eager touch—and if I could have known the thrill of that dapple-grey rocking-horse when I flung my arms around its neck and buried my face in its silken mane!



Butter, Eggs, Ducks, Geese

It seems mighty convenient to telephone your grocer to send up a pound of butter and have it come all squeezed tight into a nice square-cornered cardboard box whose bright and multi-colored label assures you that the butter has been properly deodorized, fumigated, washed, sterilized, antisepticized and conforms in every other respect to the Food and Drugs Act, Serial 1762973-A. You read the label again and feel reasonably safe at meals.

Huh! Precious little grandmother knew about *that* kind of butter!

Hers came in a basket—a great big worn-brown-and-shiny, round bottom, willow basket, hand-wove. It didn't come in any white-and-gold delivery wagon, either. It was delivered by a round-faced, rosy-cheeked, gingham-gowned picture of health, whose apron-strings barely met around the middle—for Frau Hummel brought it herself—after having first milked the cows with her own hands and wielded the churning-stick with her own stout German arms. She had the butter all covered up with fresh, sweet, white-linen cloths—and hand-moulded into big rolls —each roll wrapped in its own immaculate cloth—and when that cloth was slowly pulled away so that grandmother could stick the point of a knife in the butter and test it on her tongue, you could see the white salt all over the roll—and even the imprint of

the cloth-threads . . . Good? . . . Why, you could eat it without bread!

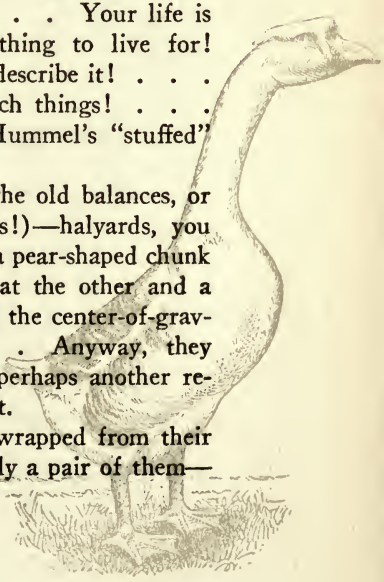
"What else have you got today, Mrs. Hummel?" (Grandmother never could say "Frau"—and as if she didn't *know* what else was in the basket!)

"Vell, Mrs. Van, dere is meppe some eks, und a dook—und also dere is left von fine stuffed geese."

So the cloth covering was rolled farther back—and the 3-dozen eggs were gently taken out and put in the old tin egg-bucket—and just then grandfather came in and lifted tenderly out of the basket one of those wonderful geese "stuffed" with good food in a dark cellar until fat enough for market. . . . Ever have a toothful of that kind of goose-breast or second joint? . . . No? . . . Your life is yet incomplete—you have something to live for! . . . Goodness me! I *can't* describe it! . . . How can a fellow tell about such things! . . . It's like—well, it's like Frau Hummel's "stuffed" goose, that's all! . . .

And then it was weighed on the old balances, or steels—(no, I don't mean scales!)—halyards, you know—a long-armed affair with a pear-shaped chunk of iron at one end and a hook at the other and a handle somewhere in between at the center-of-gravity, or some such place. . . . Anyway, they gave an honest pound, which is perhaps another respect in which they were different.

Then the ducks, too, were unwrapped from their white cloths and weighed—usually a pair of them—



and the old willow basket had nothing left but its bundle of cloths when Frau Hummel started out again on her 10-mile walk to the farm.

Whenever I see a glassy-eyed, feather-headed, cold-storage chicken half plucked and discolored hanging in a present-day butcher-shop accumulating dust—or a scrawny duck almost popping through its skin—I think of Frau Hummel and her willow basket. . . .

But Frau Hummel isn't here now—and they don't build ducks and geese like hers any more—and her old willow basket is probably in some collection, while we use these machine-made things that fall to pieces when you accidentally stub your toe against them in the cellar. . . . We are hurrying along so fast that we don't see anything until it's cooked and served. . . . We just use the phone and let them send us any old thing that they can charge on a bill. . . . But in those days grandfather and grandmother inspected everything—and it just *had* to be good—and there weren't any trusts—or eggs of various grades from just eggs to strictly fresh eggs and on down to eggs guaranteed to boil without crowing. Every Frau Hummel in the country wanted the Van Alstyne trade—and Frau Hummel knew it—and she never brought anything to that back kitchen door unless it was perfect of its kind.

No wonder grandfather lived to be 92 and grandmother 86—in good health and spirits to the last!

The Sugar Barrels

Do you remember the three barrels of sugar in the dark place under the stairs—or were they in the big pantry just off the kitchen?

Well, anyway, there were three, you recollect—two of white and one of brown.

Always the brown sugar—and each Autumn the same colloquy:

"Mr. Van, don't you think we can get along without the brown sugar this year?"

"Now, Mrs. Van, you've *got* to have a *little* brown sugar in the house—and it comes cheaper by the barrel."

"Yes, so it does, Mr. Van . . . . . We can use it, I suppose, in something . . . . . And we always have had it, and . . . . . Well, do as you think best."

White sugar was good when you had something to go with it.

But brown sugar stood alone—sticky, heavy, crumbly lumps that held together until a fellow could tip back his head and drop one of the chunks in his mouth.

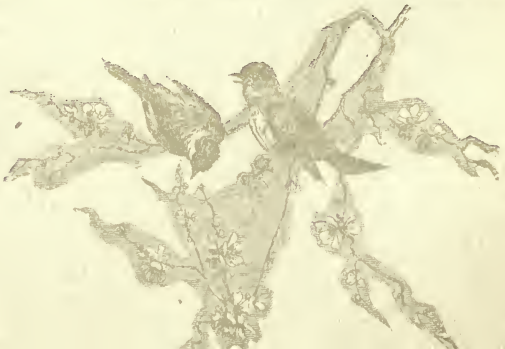
And after school grandmother could be persuaded to cut a full-size slice of bread (thick) and spread it with butter (thick) and you'd start away with it (quick)—just nibbling at one edge, not really biting—and you'd sneak into the dark place under the stairs (or into the pantry)—and reach deep down into the white sugar barrel—and grab a handful—and sprinkle it over the bread-and-butter—and shake back into the barrel all that didn't stick to the butter—and then do it all over again—and pat it down hard—and then sprinkle just a little bit more on hurriedly, (because grandfather's cane could be heard tapping down the hall)—and then you emerged with dignity, but with no unnecessary commotion—and just faded away into the Outer World so softly, so gently, so contentedly! . . . . .

(Have you tried any bread-and-butter-and-sugar recently? Did it taste the same as it used to? . . .

No? . . . Perhaps you broke it into pieces instead of beginning at one side and eating straight through?

Or maybe you got hold of the cooking butter . . . Or did you try it with baker's bread? . . .

No? . . . Well, *why* didn't it taste the same?)



Jimmy
The Lamplighter

Jimmy, the Lamplighter

The sun had gone down behind the willows on the river-bank. The night-clouds still carried the crimson-and-purple of the late twilight; and the deep, still waters of the channel gave back the colors and the gleam of the first stars that heralded the night . . . . . The martins chattered under the eaves, scolding some belated member of the clan who pushed noisily for a lodging-place for the night. The black bat and the darting nighthawk were a-wing, grim spectres of the dusk. The whip-poor-will was crying along the river, and far up-stream the loon called weirdly across the water. . . . .

A small boy was sitting on grandfather's front steps, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his palms, seeing familiar objects disappear in the gathering dusk, and watching the stars come out. He was safe, very safe—for grandfather had not gone to the dining-room yet, and his arms could be reached for shelter in two or three bounds, if need be. So it was very pleasant to sit on the steps and see the little old town fold-up its affairs and settle down for the night.

And more particularly to watch for Jimmy, the Lamplighter.

Far up the street, in the almost-dark place, about where Schmidt's shoestore ought to be, a point of

light flashed suddenly, flickered, and then burned steadily—and in a moment another, across the street . . . . Then a space of black, and two more points appeared. Down the street they came in pairs, closely following the retreating day.

And the Little Boy on the Steps knew that it was Jimmy, the Lamplighter, working his way swiftly and silently. If only the dinner-bell would delay awhile The Boy would see old Jimmy light the lamp on grandfather's corner, as he had seen him countless times before.

Then, just as the red glow faded in the West and Night settled down, he came swinging sturdily across the street, his ladder hung on his right shoulder, his wax taper in his left hand. Quickly, unerringly he placed the ladder against the iron post that sent its metalic ring into the clear night air as the ladder struck, and was three rounds up almost before it settled into position. Then a quick opening of the glass; a struggle with the matches in the wind, a hurried closing of the door, one quick look upward; an arm through the ladder and a swing to the shoulder—and Jimmy the Lamplighter was busily off to his next corner.

Once, in the later years, he came with his new lighter—a splendid brass affair, with smooth wood handle, holding a wax taper that flickered fitfully down the street and marked old Jimmy's pathway through the dusk. Although he could reach up

and turn on the gas with the key-slot at the end of the scepter and light it with the taper, all at one time, he ever carried the ladder—for none could tell when or where a burner might need fixing, or there would be other need to climb the post as in the days of the lamp and sulphur-match.

Short of stature, firm of build, was old Jimmy. The night storms of innumerable years had bronzed his skin and furrowed his face. Innumerable years, yes—for so faithful a servant as old Jimmy the Lamplighter was not to be cast away by every caprice of the public mind which changed the political aspect of the town council. So Jimmy stayed on through the years and changing administrations —in the sultry heat of the summer nights, or breasting his way through winter's huge snow-drifts, fronting the wind-driven sleet, or dripping through the spring-time rain, his taper hugged tight beneath his thick rubber coat, his matches safe in the depths of an inside pocket.

And tonight, as the Boy still watches, in memory, old Jimmy on his rounds, they are a bit odd, these queer old street lamps that just seem to belong to the night, after the garish blaze of electric signs and the great arc-lights in the shop windows. Yet it shines through the years, this simple lamp of the Long Ago, as it shone through the night of old—a friendly beacon only, the modest servant of an humble race. . . . .

Jimmy's boy Ted, who carried his father's ladder and taper when the good old man laid them down, now nods in his chimney-corner o' nights. But his boy, old Jimmy's grandson, is still a lamplighter—still illuminating the streets of his town, still turning on its lamps when the loon calls weirdly across the river in the gathering dusk.

He bears no ladder nor fitful taper—he dreads no sultry summer heat—he breasts no snowdrifts—he battles against no wind-driven sleet and rain.

There he sits, inside yonder great brick building, his chair tipped back against the wall, reading the evening paper while the giant wheels of the dynamo purr softly and steadily. He lowers his paper—looks at the clock—then out into the early twilight . . . . then slowly turns to the wall, pushes a bit of a button, takes up his paper again, and goes on with his reading—while a thousand lights burn white through the city! . . . .

Ah, Jimmy, Jimmy! the world is all awry, man! Your son's son lights his thousand lamps in a flash that's no more than the puff of wind that used to blow your match out when you stood on your ladder and lighted one!

Flies

Come to think of it, the Old Folks never made such a fuss about flies as we make nowadays. You cannot pick up a magazine without running plumb into an article on the deadly housefly—with pictures of him magnified until he looks like the old million-toed, barrel-eyed, spike-tailed dragon of your boyhood mince-pie dreams. The first two pages convince you that the human race is doomed to extermination within eighteen months by the housefly route!

Grandmother never resorted to very drastic measures. The most violent thing she ever did was to get little Annie, Bridget-the-housewoman's Annie, to help her chase them out. They went from room to room periodically (when flies became too numerous), each armed with an old sawed-off broom-handle on which were tacked long cloth streamers—a sort of cat-o'-nine-tails effect, only with about a score or more of tails. After herding the blue-bottles and all their kith and kin into a fairly compact bunch at the door, little Annie opened the screen and grandmother drove them out—and that's all there was to it.

Another favorite device (particularly in the dining-room and kitchen), was the "fly-gallery"—a wonderful array of multicolored tissue-paper fes-

tooned artistically from the ceiling or around the gas-pipes to lure or induce the fly into moments of inactivity. There was no extermination in this device—it was purely preventive in its function—the idea being that since there *must* be fly-specks, better to mass them as much as possible on places where they would show the least and could be removed the easiest when sufficiently accumulated.

But the greatest ounce-of-prevention was the screen hemisphere. Gee! I haven't thought of that thing for years, have you? Of course you remember it—absolutely fly-proof—one clapped over the butter, another over the cracker-bowl, another over the sugar.

And say! I almost forgot! . . . (Yes, I know you were just going to speak of it!) . . . That conical screen fly-trap—where the flies see something good inside, crawl up to the top and then over and in—and then can't get out—but just buzz and buzz and buzz—and make a lot of fuss about it—bluebottles and all—no respecter of persons—and when it gets full of the quick and dead in flydom, Bridget takes it out in the back yard and dumps it. Very simple . . . clean, peaceful, effective.

My, My! But it's a far cry back to those days, isn't it? And *wouldn't* you like to right this minute sneak into the cool, curtain-down, ever-so-quiet dining-room again . . . and nose around to see if anything edible had been overlooked—and see one of those dear old round fly-screens guarding the sugar!

The Autumn Leaves

There were three recognized uses for leaves in the Autumn—first, to be banked by the wind along fences or sidewalk edges and provide kicking-ground for exuberant youngsters returning home from school; second, to be packed around the foundations of the house as a measure for interior comfort in winter; and, third, to be pressed between the pages of the big Bible and kept for ornamental purposes until they crumbled and had to be thrown away. This last-named use was always questioned by every red-blooded boy, and more tolerated than accepted —a concession to the women of earth, from little sister with her bright-hued wreath to mother and grandmother with their book of pressed leaves.

Even for purposes of comfort their use was more or less secondary—granted because the banking-up process was a man's job and an out-door enterprise. Then, too, it was a lot of fun to rake the big yard and get the fallen leaves into one or two huge piles; and wheelbarrow them to the edge of the house where old Spencer had driven the wooden pegs that held the boards ready to receive the leaves. Load after load was dumped into the trough-like arrange-

ment and stamped down tight and hard by old Tom's huge feet and little Willie's eager but ineffective ones—and then the top board was fastened down, and never a cold winter wind could find its way under the floors with such a protective bulwark around the house. . . . And in the spring the boards had to be taken down—and countless bleached bugs fairly oozed out into the spring sunlight—and the snow-wet soggy leaves were raked out and burned, and the smoke was so thick and heavy that it hardly got out of the yard.

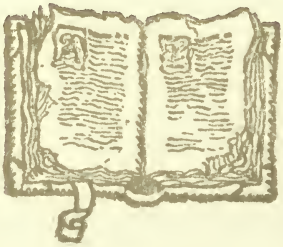
But the *real* use of leaves—their only legitimate function in the Autumn, according to all accepted boy-law—was for kicking purposes.

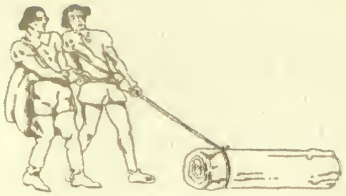
Plunging through banks of dry leaves along the edge of the sidewalk—knee-deep sometimes—scattering them in all directions, even about our heads—there was such a racket that we could scarcely hear each other's shouts of glee. And we'd run through them only to dive exhausted into some huge pile of them, rolling and kicking and hollering until some kid came along and chucked an armful, dirt and all, plumb into our face! This was the signal for a battle of leaves—and perhaps there would have been fewer tardy-marks, teacher, if there had been fewer autumn leaves along the route . . . Perhaps!

There were influences that tempered the joys of leaf-kicking—some "meanie" was always ready to hide a big rock, or other disagreeable foreign sub-

stance, under a particularly inviting bunch of leaves —then watch and giggle at your discomfiture when you came innocently ploughing along!

What a riot of wonderful color they made just after the first frosts had turned their green to red and gold and brown! As a boy I disdained so weak a thing as noticing the coloring on Big Hill —but now, in the long-after years, I realize that its vivid Autumn garment was indestructibly fixed in my memory and has lived—saved for me until I could look back through Time's long glass and understand and love that glorious picture. Not even the brush of a Barbizon master could tell the story of Big Hill, three miles up the river from Main Street bridge, gleaming in the hues that Jack Frost mixed, beneath the blue-gold dome of a cloudless sky —for it could not paint the chatter of the squirrel, or the glint of the bursting bittersweet berry, or the call of the crow, or the crisp of the air, or the joy of life that only boyhood knows!





Getting in the Wood

An autumnal event of importance, second only to the filling of the meat-house, was the purchase and sawing of the wood.

Three sizes, remember—the 4-foot lengths for the long, low stove in the Big Room, 12-inch "chunks" for the oval sheet-iron stove in the parlor, and the fine-split 18-inch lengths for the kitchen. (Yes, they burned wood in the kitchen—not only wood, but oak and maple and hickory—the kind you buy by the carat nowadays!)

And what a fire it made! Two sticks of the long wood in the stove in the Big Room, and the damper open, and you'd have to raise the windows inside of fifteen minutes no matter how low the thermometer registered outside. In the kitchen grandmother did all her cooking with a wood fire—using the ashes for the lye barrel—and the feasts that came steaming from her famous oven have never been equalled on any gas-range ever made. (Gas-range! how grandmother would have sniffed in scorn at such a sugges-

tion!) Even coal was only fit for the base burner in the family sitting-room—and that must be anthracite, or "hard" coal, the kind that comes in sacks nowadays at about the same price as butter and eggs. And even the wood had to be split just so and be "clear" and right, or grandmother would scold grandfather for not wearing his near-seeing specs when he bought it. "Guess they fooled you on that load, Mr. Van," she'd say. "It isn't like the last we had."

Don't you remember how you were hanging around the kitchen one Saturday morning kind-a waiting for something to come within reach, and grandfather's cane came tap-tapping down the long hall, and he pushed open the kitchen door and stood there, just inside the door, until the kettle started boiling over and making such a noise. And then he announced that he thought he better go out and see if there was any wood in market. (As if there weren't fifty farmers lined up there almost before daylight!) It was about nine o'clock and the sun had had a chance to warm things up a bit—so grandmother wrapped him up in his knitted muffler and away he went beneath his shiny silk hat. And because you stood around and looked wistfully up at him, he finally turned back, just before he reached the big front door and said: "Want to go along, Billie?" Of course you went, because there were all kinds of shops on the way up town to the wood

market and grandfather always had an extra nickle for such occasions.

Can't you just see that wood-market now, as it used to be in the Long Ago—with its big platform scales—and its wagons of accurately-piled cord-wood marked on the end of some stick with the white chalk-mark of the official "inspector" and measurer —and the farmers all bundled-up and tied-around with various cold-dispelling devices and big mitts and fur caps? So far as *you* could tell then (or now, either, I'll wager!) every load was exactly like every other load—but not so to grandfather, for he would scrutinize them all, sound them with his stick, barter and dicker and look out for knots—and then make the rounds again and do it all over before finally making his selection—and I distinctly remember feeling that the wood left in market after grandfather had made his selection wasn't worth hauling away!

Load after load was driven up to the high back-yard fence and its sticks heaved into the yard and piled in perfect order—and it made a goodly and formidable showing when Old Pete, the wood-sawyer, finally arrived on the scene. The time of wood-buying was determined partly by Pete's engagements—he went first to the Perkinses and next to the Williamses and so on in rotation as he had done for years, his entire winter being "engaged" far ahead. It did not seem possible, to boyish mind,

that one man could *ever* get all that wood sawed and split, even if he was a great giant Norseman with the finest buck-saw in the country.

But each year Old Pete's prowess seemed to increase—and day after day the ceaseless music of his saw sounded across the crisp air—and the measured strokes of his axe struck a clarion note—until finally the yard showed only chips and saw-dust where that vast wood-pile had been—and the big barn was piled full to the rafters—the kitchen wood and chunks on one side, the big wood on the other.

Then Pete would come in and announce that the job was done—and grandfather would bundle-up and go out for a final inspection. Pete removed the pad from his leg (you remember the carpet he wore on his left knee—the one that held the stick in place in the buck when he was sawing) and together they went into the barn—and talked it all over—and Pete said it was harder wood than last year's and more knots in it and ought to be worth two shillings more than contract price—and grandfather finally allowed the excess—and Old Pete came in and got his money (in gold and silver) and a bowl of coffee and some bread—and went his way to the Jonesses or some other folks.

And you, young man—you surely hated to see that great Viking go—for he had told you many a wonderful tale at the noon hour as he munched his thick sandwiches—and no one could look at his

massive head and huge shoulders and great beard and hair and doubt that his forebears had done all that he credited to them.

Somehow, Old Pete seemed more real than most men you knew—except grandfather, of course. There was something unexplainable in the man and his work that rang true—something that was so wholesome and sound. He wasn't like old Hawkins, the grocer—*he'd* as lief give you a rotten apple as not if he could smuggle it into the bag without you seeing him; and Kline the candy-man sometimes sold you old hard stuff mixed with the fresh. But Old Pete here—he just worked honest and steady—out in the open—at a fixed wage—and he did an honest job and was proud of it even if it was only sawing wood. He worked faithfully until it was done, and then he got a good word and a bowl of coffee and his wages in gold and silver—and went his way rejoicing, leaving behind him the glory of labor well performed blending with the refreshing fragrance of new-cut logs that sifted through the cracks of the old barn.

The Rain

It is early, and Saturday morning—very, very early.

Listen! . . . An unmistakable drip, drip, drip . . . and the room is dark.

A bound out of bed—a quick step to the window—an anxious peering through the wet panes . . . . and the confirmation is complete.

It is raining—and on *Saturday;* the familiar leaden skies and steady drip that spell permanency and send the robin to the shelter of some thick bush, and leave only an occasional undaunted swallow cleaving the air on swift wing.

In all the world there is no sadness like that which in boyhood sends you back to bed on Saturday morning with the mournful drip, drip, drip of a steady rain doling in your ears.

Out in the woodshed there is a can of the largest, fattest angle-worms ever dug from a rich garden-plot—all so happily, so feverishly, so exultantly captured last night when Anticipation strengthened the little muscles that wielded the heavy spade. All

safe in their black soil they wait, coiled round and round each other into a solid worm-ball in the bottom of the can.

A mile down the river the dam is calling—the tumbled waters are swirling and eddying and foaming over the deep places where the black-bass wait —and old Shoemaker Schmidt, patriarch of the river, is there this very minute, unwinding his pole, for well he knows that if one cares to brave the weather he will catch the largest and finest and most bass when the rain is falling on the river.

But small boys who have anxious mothers do not go fishing on rainy days—so there is no need of haste, and one might as well go back to bed and sleep unconcernedly just as late as possible. If only a fellow could get up between showers, or before the rain actually starts, so that he could truthfully say: "But, mother, really and truly, it wasn't raining when we started!" it would be all right, and the escape was warrantable, justified and safe; but with the rain actually falling, there was nothing to do but go to sleep again and turn the worms back into the garden if the rain didn't let up by noon.

It is one of the miracles of life that Boyhood can turn grief into joy and become almost instantly reconciled to the inevitable like a true philosopher, and change a sorrow into a blessing. The companion miracle is that Manhood with its years of wisdom forgets how to do this.

And so, when the rainy day becomes hopelessly rainy, and Shoemaker Schmidt is left alone at the dam, the rain that sounded so dismal at dawn proves to be a benefactor after all. There will be no wood-splitting today, no outdoor chores—for if it's too wet to go fishing, as mother insists, of course it's too wet to carry wood, or weed gardens or pick cucumbers for pickles. The logic is so obvious and conclusive that even mother does not press the point when you remind her of it—and you are free for a whole day in the attic.

Instantly the blessing is manifest—the sadness of that day-break drip, drip, drip is healed—the whole character of the day is changed, and the rain-melody becomes not a funeral-march but a dance.

The attic is the place of all places you would most love to be on this particular calendar day!

How stupid to spoil a perfectly good Saturday by sitting on a hard beam, with wet spray blowing in your face all the time, and getting all tired out holding a heavy fish-pole, when here is the attic waiting for you with its mysterious dark corners, its scurrying mice that suddenly develop into lions for your bow-and-arrow hunting, and its maneuvers on the broad field of its floor with yourself as the drum-corps and your companions as the army equipped with wooden swords and paper helmets!

The day has been rich in adventure, and exploration, and the doing of great deeds.

And it has been all too short, for the attic is growing dim, and mother is again calling us—telling us to send our little playmates home and come and get our bread and milk.

A last arrow is shot into the farthest corner where some undiscovered jungle beast may be prowling.

A last roll is given to the drum, and the army disbands.

A sudden fear seizes upon us as we realize that night has come and we are in the attic, alone.

And with no need of further urging we scamper unceremoniously down the stairs, slam the attic door, and hurry into the kitchen where Maggie has our table waiting . . . .

Eight o'clock—and we're all tucked away among the feathers again!

Aren't we glad we didn't go down to the river—it would have been a cold, dismal day—and perhaps they weren't biting today, anyway—and we should have gotten very wet.

It is still raining, raining hard—pattering unceasingly on the roof . . . And the tin eave-troughs are singing their gentle lullaby of running water trickling from the shingles . . . a lullaby so soothing that we do not hear mother softly open the door . . . and come to our crib . . . and place the little bare arms under the covers . . and leave a kiss on the yellow curls and a benediction in the room.

Grandmother

Do you remember the day she lost her glasses? My, such a commotion! Everybody turned in to hunt for them. Grandmother tramped from one end of the house to the other—we *all* searched—upstairs and down—with no success.

They weren't in the big Bible (we turned the leaves carefully many times—it was the most likely place). They weren't in either of her sewing baskets, nor in the cook-book in the kitchen. Grandfather said she could use one pair of his gold-bowed ones—but shucks! She couldn't see with anything except those old steel-bowed specs! . . .

And then, when she finally sat down and said for the fiftieth time: "I wonder where those specs are!" . . . and put the corner of her apron to her

eyes—I happened to look up, and there they were—on the top of her head! Been there all the time . . . And she enjoyed the joke as much as we did—a joke that went around the little town and followed her through all the years within my memory of her.

Sometimes (as often as expedient), you asked her for a penny—never more, and then:

"Now, Willie, what do you want with a penny? I haven't got it. Run along now."

"Aw, Gran'ma, don't make a feller tell what he's goin' to buy. I know you got one—Look'n see! Please, Gran'ma!"

Slowly the wrinkled hand would fumble for that skirt-pocket which was always so hard to locate—and from its depths there would come the old worn leather wallet with a strap around it—and slowly, (gee! how s-l-o-w-l-y),—after much fumbling, during which you were never *sure* whether you were going to get it or not . . . the penny would come forth and be placed (with seeming reluctance) in the grimy, dirty boy-hand. And usually, just as you reached the door on your hurried way to the nearest candy-shop, she would scare you almost stiff by calling you back, and say:

"Wait a minute, Willie, I found another one that I didn't know was in here!"

And then you kissed her wrinkled, soft cheek and ran away thinking, after all, grandmother was pretty good.

Good?

Can a woman stick to a man through sixty-odd years—and keep his linen and his broadcloth—and bear him children—and make them into fine wives and husbands—and take them back to her bosom when their mates turn against them—and raise a bunch of riotous grandchildren—and manage such a household as ours with never a complaint—get up at five o'clock every morning and sit up till half-after nine o'clock every night—busy all the time—and nurse her own and other folks' ailments without a murmur—and submerge self completely in her constant doing for others—can a frail woman so live for eighty-six years and be anything less than good?

And then, at the end of the long journey she was still trudging patiently and gladly along, side by side with Grandfather—making less fuss over the years-old pain in her knees than we make now over a splinter in a finger—going daily and uncomplainingly about her manifold duties.

And at night, about an hour before bedtime, she would sit down in the black-upholstered rocker almost behind the big base burner—her first quiet moment in all the long day—head resting against the chair's high back—and doze and listen to the

fitful conversation in the room, or to someone reading—giving everything, demanding nothing—as had been her wont all the long years!

And Christmas eve . . . (I'll have to go a bit slow now) . . . On Christmas eve, you remember, when out-of-doors the big snow-flakes were slowly and softly fluttering down, grandmother would get the huge Bible and her treasure-box and bring them up to the little round table covered with its red cloth . . . And you'd get a chair and come up close ('cause you knew what was happening) . . . Then she would read you a wonderful story out of the Bible about the love of God so great that He sent His only-begotten Son to be a Light unto the World . . . and then she'd go down into that little old card-board treasure-box and find some Christmas carols printed in beautiful colors on lace-edged cards folded up just like a fan. She would look down at you over the top of her specs and tell you how the street minstrels in England used to stand out in the snow and sing, and be brought into the house and given a warm mug and a bite to eat—going from house to house all through the early night . . .

And then she would close her eyes and begin to sing the dear old carols . . . with the tremble in her voice . . . and tapping on the table with her finger-ends in rhythm . . . and Memory's

tears dropping on the wrinkled cheeks . . . and the tremulous voice, still soft and sweet, chanting:

"God rest you, merrie gentlemen!
Let nothing you dismay;
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day!"

. . . . . .

Aye and amen, dear soul! God rest *you*—and He does!

When Day is Done

If the page blurs, as it may do if you were ever a child and if you have been tempered in the cruel furnace of the years, maybe the mists that fill the eyes will bathe the soul of you in their hallowed flood until the world-ache is soothed, and you can start up the big road again with some of the same wonderful exultation that sped you onward and forward in the Long Ago . . . One touch of that, and the burden of Today, grown great in the years of struggle, slips from your shoulders as lightly as the wild-rose petal drops upon the bosom of the stream and floats away to the music of the riffles.

Only a strong man can go back over the Old Road to the beginning-point—facing the memories that throng the path—meeting the surging emotions that sweep away all our carefully-laid defenses—braving the grim spectre that puts the white seal of age upon our heads.

Once more, in the cool of the late twilight, we'll sit with chin in hand on grandfather's front steps and

watch the stars come out . . . and hear the loon calling weirdly across the water . . . and catch the perfume of the lilacs and narcissus from the garden . . . and gather at grandmother's knee to feel her soft fingers in our curls and hear her bedtime story. Half asleep, but ever reluctant, we will trudge stumblingly to the little room with its deep feather bed, and get into our red-flannel nightie. Down on our knees, with our face in the soft edges of the mattress and tiny hands uplifted, we will say our prayers, and end them in the same old way: "God bless father and mother, and grandfather and grandmother . . . and eve-ery-body . . . else in . . . the . . . world . . amen . . . " and feel those strong mother-arms lifting our sleepy form into the downy depths!

Never until now have we known the reality of the boy-days, or paused to receive their hallowed touch.

Grandfather and grandmother, and the garden, and the river, and the song of the robin in the apple-tree, and all the myriad experiences of the boy-time, are glorified now as never before. In the halcyon Then they were but incidents of the day; in the mellowed Now we learn the truth of them, and catch their wondrous meaning.

The flower blossoms are gleaming as colorful and fragrant today as they did in the Long Ago. The

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bird-songs are as tuneful now as they were then. The sun is shining just as golden and as genial this moment as it did when we sat on the beams of the mill-race and felt on our faces the spray of tumbling waters sun-warmed in the air.

We need only open our hearts and let the sunshine in!

And Youth and Age, blended and rejoicing, will go hand in hand along the path of life to its far goal bestowing upon us all the freshness of the dew-damp morning, all the vigor of the strenuous noon, and all the peace and calm assurance of the star-lit night.

EDITORIAL REVIEW
FROM THE EDITORIAL PAGE OF
THE LOS ANGELES TIMES
ISSUE OF
DECEMBER 4, 1916

A Book of Heart Throbs

"The Long Ago," by J. W. Wright, and Its Charm

"Oh, to go back to the place where I was born!" sings Walt Whitman, and his plaintive song finds echo in a million human hearts. And because we all cherish the memories of childhood, "The Long Ago" will appeal most tenderly to everyone who reads it. "The Long Ago" is an artistically illustrated Christmas gift-book, the composition of J. W. Wright, a gifted and lovable Pasadena writer whose recollection of boyhood's golden years, blending with the purple maturity of manhood, have found expression in this little volume of poetic essays. In a style that recalls the sweet simplicity of James Lane Allen, revealing an enviable knowledge of nature and her ways, and interspersed with gentle touches of humor, the author takes the reader by the hand and leads him back to the rosy vale of the past, illuminated by life's morning star. He tells of the river that wound its crystal way by the old homestead, the river in which he swam and fished by day, the river whose music lulled him to sleep at night. He writes of the autumn leaves and the sighing winds and the falling rain. He writes of the old-time Christmas and the gladness that the season always brought to a childish heart so easily made happy.

He describes grandmother's garden, dwells upon the old lady's love for the blossoms of her care and says that, like all real gardens, there was something more to this bright spot besides just flowers and fragrance.

Half hidden by the weeds of riper experiences or shadowed by ambition's spreading growth, somewhere within the heart of every man still blooms that garden of the long ago. The flowers in that garden never die, for they are the blossoms of hope and faith and innocence and love. Undoubtedly there is a reason for man's sojourn on earth, though the plan we may not know. Yet now and then it is given us to see that all our mistakes and embarrassments, the selfishness of egotism and the sin of unhappiness, are but shadows we have brought upon ourselves. And who would doubt that in that blessed afterwhile, when we have done with the artificialities of a superficial existence, we shall waken to new life and youth that is eternal, all the wiser for the vanities relinquished, all the better for the sorrows of the years? After all, to the heart in tune, it is easy to trust in God, it is natural to love. It is doubt that is difficult, it is hatred that is hard. Childhood is ever beautiful because childhood is true and innocent, because it does not complicate existence, because it shows its gratitude by simply being glad. Happy that man who has the power to bring again to us the blessed memories of the long ago! "We need only open our hearts and let the sunshine in. And youth and age, blended and rejoicing, will go hand in hand along the path of life to its far goal, bestowing upon us all the freshness of the dew-damp morning, all the vigor of the strenuous noon and all the peace and calm assurance of the starlit night."

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